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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the reading comprehension and writing production of non-English speakers was examined in an exploratory study to determine whether knowledge gained through reading academic texts can facilitate the writing of compositions. The 10 subjects were enrolled in a developmental English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) university-level class. Self-report sessions were conducted for seven compositions during a 15-week semester. An examination of the transcripts of the recorded sessions suggests that the effects of knowledge gained from reading instruction on expository writing can be categorized as follows: information or comprehension of the concepts of the reading passage; process or adoption of the method of organization of information in the passage; and transaction or awareness of the reader/writer relationship. Although the boundaries between these categories sometimes merge, the writer's ability to use and organize information obtained from reading a passage is supported by the transcribed self-report sessions. The implication is that the teaching of reading and writing skills should be interrelated for comprehension and communication in a foreign language. Contains 12 references. (Author/LB)

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THE READING/WRITING RELATIONSHIP: A PEDAGOGICAL STUDY

The relationship between the reading comprehension and writing production of non-English speakers was examined in this exploratory study to determine if knowledge gained through reading academic texts can facilitate the writing of compositions. The ten subjects (TOEFL range of 500-525) were enrolled in a developmental ESL class on the university level. The researcher conferred with the subjects while they were in the process of writing compositions on topics related to what they had read and discussed in class. These self-report sessions were conducted for seven compositions during a fifteen week semester. An examination of the transcriptions of the recorded sessions suggests that the effects of knowledge gained from reading instruction on expository writing can be categorized as follows: information or comprehension of the concepts of the reading passage, process or adoption of the method of organization of information in the passage, transaction or awareness of the reader/writer relationship. Even though the boundaries between these categories sometimes merge, the writer's ability to use and organize information obtained from a reading passage is supported with citations from the transcribed self-report sessions. This exploratory study implies that the teaching of reading and writing skills should be interrelated for comprehension and communication in a foreign language.

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Reading and writing skills are considered inverse cognitive-linguistic processes of constructing and composing meaning for communication. Readers construct meaning from a text for comprehension, using their background experience and knowledge of the topic and the language cues chosen by the writer. Writers construct meaning as they compose texts, using their background experience to generate ideas and their knowledge of the language to cue readers for comprehension. This delineation of the reading/writing process (e.g., deBeaugrande, 1979; Tierney and Pearson, 1983) has led to the premise that the development of an interaction between the reader/writer and the text is an essential component of teaching both skills. Instruction in the organization of written discourse and the use of textual elements to communicate meaning in a reading passage can help students to develop better writing strategies (Smith, 1983). Likewise, instruction in writing can develop reading strategies to interpret textual discourse (Dubin and Olshtain, 1980). Such theoretical models of teaching have resulted in textbooks designed to develop both skills as interrelated.

A large number of studies which used a range of measures and treatments with native speakers of English have shown statistically significant correlations between reading achievement and the syntactic complexity and the absence of usage errors in written composition, between the amount of reading experience (leisure-time reading) and general writing ability. (For a review of these studies, see Stotsky, 1984 and Belanger, 1987.) A few studies have examined the reading/writing relationship in the second language. Statistically significant correlations have been found between pleasure reading and writing proficiency (Janapoulos, 1986) and between reading and writing ability (Carson et al, 1990). A relationship has also been found between academic reading and ESP writing (Flahive, 1991), a study which is more relevant to the topic of reading instruction.

However, experimental studies have indicated that attempts to improve expository writing through reading instruction have

generally had little success for native speakers of English. (For a review of such studies, see Stotsky, 1984.) In these studies, students were expected to independently transfer knowledge from the reading passages to their essay writing.

Only one study, that of Bossone and Quitman, 1976, (cited in Stotsky, 1984, and Belanger, 1987) reported statistically significant effects of reading instruction on both the reading and writing ability of native speakers of English on the secondary level. At the end of the semester, 80% of the students in the experimental groups had improved in their essays compared with 45% of the students in the control groups. In this study, the effects on students' expository writing were examined in highly structured courses which related reading and writing instruction. Unlike the other studies, students were directly guided by instructors to use, in their writing, knowledge about content and organization gained from the reading passage

Because of the lack of available research on the effect of reading instruction on the writing behavior of second language learners, this exploratory study addresses these three questions: 1. Does instruction in the analysis of concepts and related lexical items in a reading passage have an effect on the generation of ideas in writing? 2. Does instruction in the analysis of paragraph organization in the reading passage have an effect on the communication of a fully developed concept in writing? 3. Does awareness of the reader/writer relationship have an effect on the rereading and revising of what has been written for better communication?

INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD

Subjects met with the instructor as an independent study group six times a week during a 15-week semester. A total of twelve hours (two weeks) were spent on each reading passage and its related reading/writing activities: three hours per week for reading instruction and three hours in 1 1/2 hour sessions per week for related writing activities.

The textbooks used for instruction were designed to develop both reading and writing skills (Gregg, 1977; Gregg and Russell,

1985). These textbooks contain reading passages which range from 1000 to 2000 words and from four to ten paragraphs in length. Written in unadapted academic English, the reading passages give information on the physical and social sciences, topics with which subjects state unfamiliarity. As the reading passages are related in subject matter, information learned from a preceding passage could be used for comprehension of the texts. The reading/writing activities in the textbook were adapted and supplemented to meet the instructional purposes of this study.

One of the instructional purposes was for subjects to analyze concepts and related vocabulary in the reading passage based on the hypothesis that this instruction would have an effect on the generation of ideas for related topics in writing. Subjects were taught and assigned to ask each other questions concerning concepts and vocabulary in the reading passages. Thus, in-class discussion of the reading passage was student-led and resulted in a reliance on the text, rather than on the teacher, to construct its meaning.

Another instructional purpose was for subjects to analyze paragraph organization in the reading passage based on the hypothesis that this instruction would have an effect on the ability to communicate a fully developed concept in writing. Subjects were assigned to outline, in a "flow chart", superordinate and subordinate idea units in the reading passage. Then, subjects in pairs and as a group came to a consensus on one conceptual flow-chart for the passage, supporting their points of view with the text. The final activity was a written summary of the main ideas of the passage, based on the in-class outline. Exercises were also designed for subjects to learn to express, develop, and organize their views in writing on given topics related to the topic or organization of a corresponding reading passage. This instruction in composition alternated weekly with communicative oral and written activities for better comprehension of the reading passage and for better control of structures.

The final instructional purpose of the course was for

subjects to become aware of the reader/writer relationship, based on the hypothesis that audience awareness has an effect on the writer's rereading and revising of what has been written. In the self-report sessions with the instructor, subjects were asked how they planned to revise the content and organization of the rough drafts of their compositions for better communication with a potential reader.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Subjects. All ten subjects were students in their first semester of undergraduate study in the university and had arrived in the U.S. fewer than two weeks before the beginning of the semester. The group consisted of four Chinese speakers (Peoples' Republic of China, Hongkong, Singapore, Malaysia), three Japanese speakers, and three Malay speakers.

Subjects were enrolled in an ESL course in communication skills which preceded a required composition course with native speakers of English. In an oral interview at the beginning of the course, subjects reported that they read a lot and enjoyed reading in the first language. However, they stated that reading in their English classes in their own countries had consisted of word-by-word translating o narratives from British and American literature. Subjects also reported good grades received on compositions written in the first language but that they had had no experience writing compositions in English. Thus, based on these self-evaluations, subjects could be considered skilled reader/writers in the first language and unskilled reader/writers in the second language. Their overall English language proficiency (TOEFL range of 500-525) with low scores in the reading comprehension section supported their low self-evaluations. ESL instructors also assessed as "weak" the development and organization of ideas and sentence structure in written compositions.

Procedure. The method of research selected was the case study approach with oral self-reports, as has been used in process-centered studies in ESL composition. There were seven reading passages, each followed by a written composition and a

recorded self-report session with the instructor.

Subjects wrote rough drafts of their compositions during a 1 1/2 hour class period. They had been guided by the instructor of the course to use in their compositions what they had learned about writing from their reading. The composition drafts written in class were only marked for errors in sentence structure and were returned to the subjects for revision at the self-report sessions. These sessions were conducted individually with subjects within 24 hours of having written the in-class composition drafts. Their approaches to the writing assignment and perspective of their writing in relation to what they had read were elicited in the self-report sessions. Subjects were asked to give their perceptions of how they had used the content and organization of the reading passage in their writing. They were asked to explain how they had approached writing the composition and how they planned to revise the content and organization for better communication with the reader in the final written version. As subjects were still involved in the writing task during these sessions, they could better remember goals and sub-goals for their compositions. Subjects would also not be influenced by the instructor's final evaluation of the composition and thus, could not say what they thought the instructor expected. The final evaluations of the quality of the compositions were given to the revisions after the self-report sessions.

RESULTS

An examination of the transcriptions of the recorded self-report sessions suggests that the effects of the reading instruction on expository writing can be categorized as follows: information or comprehension of the concepts of the reading passage, process or adoption of the method of organization of information in the reading passage, and transaction or awareness of the writer/reader relationship. Even though the boundaries between these categories sometimes merge, the writer's use of information and organization obtained from a reading passage can be illustrated with citations from the recorded self-report

sessions.

Effects on writing of the pre-writing analysis of concepts and related vocabulary in the reading passage. Subjects were asked to use information from the reading passage as well as their own experience to facilitate writing. The following example comments from the self-report sessions indicate that the reading passage gave subjects new concepts and experiential knowledge.

---Before I read this, I didn't know the meaning of "ecology".

---It (the reading passage) gave me some ideas on pollution, ecology, how people manage ecology. I can't write about the effects (of pollution) without reading this first.

---I had three concepts (in this composition) and each concept had one example. I took the examples from the text. I had to use the examples in the text as there are no examples from my life.

For other subjects, the reading passage triggered known information obtained from personal experience, as shown in the following example comments.

---My opinion is in total contrast with the opinion of the author. The author says that the traditional air cooling method is beneficial but in my opinion, I think the modern air conditioning system is more convenient.

---Without reading this, I might have wasted a lot of time thinking about it. He (the writer) argued for traditional cooling systems and I argued for modern convenience.

---I know about the environment. How the population affects the environment. I know my home city has air pollution. Smoke from the factories. Very bad.

---I just started writing because I've experienced that. Back home I used to face this kind of problem about the sewage pipes so I know a lot. That is why I begin to just start writing. I didn't really think about pre-planning. I know it in my head. It reminds me a lot of home. Especially when it talks about the natural environment. It reminds me a lot of my background.

---Reading this is somewhat a rehearsal. It prepares for you so you know what to say. My city does not have this sort of environment.

---This passage is on human development and my composition is on my development as a human being from the influence of my father.

---The reading passage says that food selection of different cultures depends on the environment. I'm trying to tell how the physical environment is related with the food in my hometown because the climate and the physical environment is tropical which is good for the banana.

The analysis of lexical elements may have helped in the comprehension of concepts in the reading passage but did not seem to facilitate writing. Only two subjects stated that they had actually used vocabulary from the passage in their writing. Two other subjects stated that they had used adjectives for the description of a person in the same way as the author of the passage had done. Another subject stated that an attempt to use new vocabulary from the reading passage would have interfered with writing.

Effects on writing of the pre-writing analysis of paragraph organization in the reading passage. Paragraph organization is defined in this study as the relevance of sentences to the topic and the interrelationship and order of sentences in a paragraph. Subjects were asked to adopt the organization exemplified in the reading passage in their writing. The following example comments on how information was organized for writing on an assigned topic indicate the effects on writing of the paragraph organization in the reading passage.

---The paragraphs (in the reading passage) gave me a basic idea about what is a good one (paragraph). First, I tried to choose the topic on water pollution but I didn't have any idea about the ending so I changed (the topic).

---I omitted these details because it's too broad. I just want to use these points. If I include these, I don't support my topic.

---I was thinking about friends but I didn't talk about them because it seems too long for one paragraph and it has no relation.

---They (the reading passage and the composition) resemble each other in the statement of cause/effect. The text says that because of the great continental blocks pushing together, the ocean floor forms. I think that's similar (in organization) to my composition on the causes/effects of reckless driving

Effects on writing of the awareness of the writer/reader relationship. In this study, two transactional communicative relationships seem to exist between the reader and the writer: one between the author of the reading passage and the reader and the other between the writer of the composition and its potential reader.

Students were asked to express in writing their interpretations of the following passage:

"When one day is like all the others, then they are all like one; complete uniformity would make the longest life seem short, and as though it had stolen away from us unawares . . . periods of change and novelty (are) the only means by which we can refresh our sense of time, strengthen, retard, and rejuvenate it, and therewith renew our perception of life itself." (from Thomas Mann, The Majic Mountain, quoted in Gregg, 1977: 157-8)

In order to construct the meaning of the preceding passage, subjects seemed to revise the information according to their own background experience, as exemplified in the following comments in the written reactions to the passage.

---I agree with Mann. Last night when I read this passage more carefully, I found what he is saying is that with every day repeated as the day before, there is no memory in the mind. That's why life seems shorter because there is nothing to remember. But if every day is new and a lot of things happen, when you look back, there's a lot of things to think about and life seems longer.

---(Mann says that) uniform days make one's life short and variety makes life longer. I don't agree with him as I think

variety makes days shorter.

---Mann said that life seems short with change. If we understand daily life, we think life is very short. If something strange happens - unusual - that refreshes us and makes life seem long. So I didn't agree with his idea.

---We make our perceptions of time. We can change our perception of time and life by novelty - many different kinds of experience - because if I do different things every day, I can have many memories in my brain.

---The day I left home - that day seems to be shorter than other days because everything happened so fast that I can't remember what happened. It was something different - it was a change but it seems to be short, not longer. But I'm still thinking that if you do the same things every day, it's boring but when you think that the things that you did, like when I return to my home, when I think of the things that I'm doing here, it seems to be short. I think that if you do these things every day, that is when you need to do something different. Later when you think about the things that you did, if you did a lot of different things, it will be a long time. But when you are doing a lot, it seems to be short.

The following example comments in the self-report sessions point out how writers added, deleted, or rearranged information in the rough draft or plan to revise for the final composition in order to add clarity for the reader.

---I plan to brainstorm some more. It's better t mention Asian marriage structure as it's a controversy in a developing country and brings out a lot of problems. When I rewrite this composition, I want to have four subtopics and in the fourth one, to conclude the first three and show a controversy. I added some information to the rough draft as I have to add examples. In the second part, I changed a little bit. At first, I'm being the third person at every point; them, they. After that, I think I must be inside the passage. After I add these examples, it's me. At first, I talk about old friends as a generalization and then give examples. Then, the ones the same age. Then, the

conclusion.

---I added more detail to the rough draft - the examples. I thought of them during the brainstorming but I didn't write them down. I make the changes in my mind.

---First, I list causes. I combine. Some of this is not really important so I cross it out.

---I omitted that Japanese eat with chopsticks as it's not related to the importance of eating and educating children in a like manner. It's not a problem of what they eat with - chopsticks or fork and knife.

---I didn't include religion (as an important element in a happy marriage). I don't think it's very important. I think the most important is education.

---I thought about this again yesterday morning and I changed. I didn't change the people but (it's) more organized. What I want to talk about - the ideas - I make changes. I drop ideas. I want it to be clear.

---When I write something, sometimes I change. Probably when I'm in the middle, I don't want to continue. So I start again. Sometimes I think I should organize in this way, but when I write, I change. Sometimes when I copy, I make some changes too. I make changes for a reader to understand.

---When I write the final copy, I'll combine the meaning of the sentences and decide what is first, what is second. The sentences are not in the same order as in the rough draft. Sometimes when you write something the first time, you can't think very clearly or very organized. And then you want to catch yourself and write down and then go back and you change.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this exploratory study suggests that the instructional method described in this report for interrelating reading texts with composition seems to be effective for teaching writing skills. The effectiveness of guiding students to use what they have learned about writing from their reading can be clearly seen in the comments made by the students in the self-report sessions. In addition, all of these students were

able to write acceptable coherent compositions which communicated well-developed concepts at the end of the semester. They also succeeded in competition with native speakers of English in the composition course during the following semester.

This exploratory study could be followed by an experimental study in which subjects are again guided to us in writing what they have learned from their reading. Case studies could be supplemented by an analysis of the compositions to determine the topical, linguistic, and organizational elements used by the subjects from the reading passage. In these case studies, students could comment on the textual elements used with the reading passage in front of them.

The reading/writing relationship could be greatly enhanced in integrated-skills syllabi where these skills are already taught side-by-side. Content-based syllabi provide reading materials that could be integrated into writing assignments.

The pre-writing analysis of concepts in the reading passage gave or stimulated background information on a related topic for the writing assignment. As a result, students were free to concentrate on "how to say it" rather than on "what to say". Students were also asked to relate the topics to their own lives and as a result, they were motivated to accurately communicate their own feelings and ideas to the reader. These students were also aware of their lack of experience in writing in English and were fearful of competing with native speakers, not only in the required composition course but in other academic subjects. The pre-writing analysis of textual organization in the reading passage gave the subjects in this study a guide to plan their own writing to communicate with potential professors in academic courses. The instructional method could be adapted for LEP students on primary/secondary levels.

In the individual self-report sessions, the students became aware of the reader/writer relationship and the problems that a reader could have in interpreting what they have written. In addition, the personal interaction between writer/student and reader/instructor in the self-report sessions was a motivating

force for better communication in writing.

Note.

This paper was presented at the annual convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in New York City in March, 1991.

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